

AIESEC HISTORY

AIESEC, originally an abbreviation for *Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales*, is an international non-political and non-profit organisation run by students and recent graduates of institutions of higher education from the countries all over the world.

The main motto of AIESEC is: „THE INTERNATIONAL PLATFORM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO DISCOVER AND DEVELOP THEIR POTENTIAL SO AS TO HAVE POSITIVE IMPACT ON SOCIETY“.

PRAXIS AND AIESE

Though it all began in 1948 under the name of AIESEC, the concept of an international organisation arranging the *exchange of student trainees* was not entirely new in the 1940's, shortly after World War II.

It is necessary to mention two forerunners of AIESEC. The first one was an organisation called PRAXIS which was founded by Scandinavian business schools in the late 1930's. These schools organised in the late thirties and during the war a formal exchange programme of their own on the territory of Scandinavia. Though it was an organisation on a small scale, it was rather effective. It was more than obvious that PRAXIS could not withstand the anxieties and destruction of the world, global war. Thus PRAXIS became out of many casualties of the war. The need of such an organisation was even more prevalent at the end of the world. An exchange organisation was needed on a larger scale.

The idea started being acute in 1944. The reasons were more than obvious. The whole generation of European managers was effected by the war (killed, injured, devastated, horribly effected) or at least were put aside from manager's field. Companies, enterprises and factories were mainly destroyed or in a big mess. There was an acute need for a new managers' generation such as executives, managers and leaders. The responsibilities were put on shoulders of business schools in Europe. They were responsible for education of a large number of well-trained individuals both on theoretical and practical fields. Practical experience should be supported.

In 1944 the neutral Scandinavian business schools were still exchanging in the frame of PRAXIS. It is witnessed that in the end of the war three persons started being in mutual contact and came to an idea of an international organisation which would help to fill up the gap of young and efficient economic and business managers. These were *Bertil Hedberg* (an official at the Stockholm School of Economics) and *Jaroslav Zich* (a Czech student) and *Stanislas Callens* (a Belgian student). These three persons are said to have met (probably in Stockholm) and to found an organisation called AIESE (Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Commerciales et Economiques), the predecessor of AIESEC.

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The first AIESE congress was held in Liège (Belgium) in 1946. The first President was elected (period 1946 - 1947) Jaroslav Zich (Czech student), in the Executive Board were further on: Bertil Hedberg (Sweden), Stanislas Callens (Belgium), Bédou (France), Piccard (Switzerland) a Treasurer (the Netherlands). The seat of the AIESE was in Prague. The organisation started publishing the journal „Revue Internationale des Etudes Supérieures en Sciences Economiques (Commerciales et Industrielles) et Sociales“.

It is necessary to state that even before AIESE there was an organisation on the territory of Scandinavia which was one of the first attempts to establish such an organisation: in March 1946 Gotheburg was the place where „Scandinavian Congress“ was held (the centre for exchanges was in 1946-47 Economic Academy in Stockholm.) Kjell Marcussen was the President.

The author of the first Statute named „Soyons prêts“ was Stanislas Callens. Further countries joined AIESE - shortly after the Liège Congress these were Yugoslavia, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Roumain, Norway and some others. AIESE wanted to join the International Union of Students (IUS), but the Executive Board in St. Gallen in 1947 decided that AIESE be neutral and stopped the idea of joining IUS.

The activity of the three enthusiasts went into further contacts shortly after the war in 1946. It was decided that AIESE would be having its official headquarters in Prague and the first top official will be Jaroslav Zich. Official steps were taken to register this student organisation in Prague in 1948. Stanislas Callens said that „the goal was to expand understanding of a nation by expanding the understanding of the individuals, changing the world one person at a time“.

However, the politics came across and destroyed the sincere idea of students. The communist political coup d'état in Czechoslovakia in February 1948 and later political development in the country completely stopped the idea. AIESE was dissolved.

AIESEC

Fortunately, students did not abandon the idea of such an organisation and decided to go on in their efforts and to find a safer haven in Europe. Stockholm was the place they chose. In March 1949 (3rd till 6th March, 1949), 89 students participated in the „Stockholm Congress“ and founded the AIESEC this time. Seven countries participated in the Congress: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. The main goal of the AIESEC was: „to supply information and study conditions, arrange trainee exchanges, provide contacts and other facilities for student visitors, and undertake exchange visits of students“. 89 students went on traineeships in the first year of AIESEC, in 1949. AIESEC was born. The idea for organising some sort of exchange programme managed to stay alive. European students were eager to rebuild their devastated countries. Students believed to take responsibility to increase international understanding and cooperation.

Jaroslav Zich and Czechoslovakia officially disappeared from the history. It is more than evident that Jaroslav Zich was one of the main initiators of AIESEC (later AIESEC). The political situation in his country stopped his AIESEC career. However, we know that he continued helping AIESEC unofficially. The last news we know about him is that he defeated his country and went to the American Sector of Germany. After that we had lost the track of him...

AIESEC TELEGRAPHICALLY, YEARS AFTER

This was the beginning which is nearly forgotten. How was it after that? Telegraphically:

EXTENSION came after. AIESEC was confronted with another war, the Cold War, survived successfully. Dynamic ideas and dynamic programs helped a lot. In a few short years AIESEC had grown at an incredible speed. The fifth International Congress was held in Nuremberg, Germany in March 1953. That year 16 countries were officially registered in the AIESEC. More countries joined the Association: Austria, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Saarland, Spain, Switzerland and Yugoslavia.

NEW CONCEPT. AIESEC spread all over. It was not only the European story any more. New country joined the Association in 1954: Turkey. Shortly after Greece and Israel. Contacts with other international organisations such as UNESCO and ICC was set up.

GOING CONTINENTALLY. AIESEC started being interested in getting their members on the other continents than Europe. The U.S.A. joined AIESEC in 1957, Colombia and Venezuela in 1958. In Johannesburg, South Africa the first national committee in Africa was born in 1958. What an excitement it was for Europe, what an excitement it was for other continents.

1959 DECADE. It was quite remarkable how other countries listened to the idea of AIESEC in the 1950's. Canada, Portugal and Ireland joined AIESEC in 1959. There were 24 national committees that year. Four continents were involved.

EQUAL SUCCESS IN 1960's. The activities of AIESEC started being attractive to other countries. Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria joined in 1961. Chile, Iceland, Peru and Tunisia became AIESEC members in 1962. Japan and Korea were members in 1962 and brought AIESEC idea into Asia. And in 1965 Australia became a member. All continents were a part of AIESEC family this year. In 1965 Australia was not the only country which was accepted as a member. AIESEC decided that Czechoslovakia be approved as a prospective member and the country as the first one within the Communist Eastern Bloc (after Yugoslavia) was approved by the International Congress in Tel-Aviv, Israel in 1966 (internal decision was taken in 1965 by top AIESEC organs).

EXTENSION AND CONSOLIDATION PROGRAMS. The 1970's witnessed AIESEC be designed in this way especially in developing countries. Extension included management development projects such as seminars, student surveys, contact talks and study tours. These projects started being very important within AIESEC structures. Innovative programs such as business games and market research projects were implemented. However, the most important international undertaking of AIESEC remained the International Traineeship Exchange Program.

AIESEC MILESTONES. In the internal structure development occurred as well. Number of traineeships continued to go up. 89 students were exchanged in the first year of AIESEC existence, it doubled in 1950 (to 169) and by 1952 it had quadrupled (to 418). The 1000 traineeships barrier was broken in 1955, by 1962 the number of traineeships had jumped to 3389 (in 2010 almost 10000 traineeships were registered). An important motion at the Bordeaux International Congress was passed: minimum allowable length of an AIESEC traineeship was changed to six weeks. Further most important internal development occurred in 1967. The role of computer was recognised and EDP (Electronic data processing) was created. AIESEC jumped into the computer era. Upgrade was accepted in the years 1986 – 1989.

PRO-ACTIVE THEME. The 1980's had brought a challenge to the Association and established a theme that would be pro-active in changing the world. It was decided that AIESEC would adopt a theme based on a sustainable development. The initiative was called the AIESEC Global Seminar Series (AGSS). It involved a series of seminars around the world that had action-oriented projects. Contacts were made with many non-corporate based organisations. International Traineeship Exchange Programme (ITEP) rebounded from a low in 1983 of 4265 to over 6500. Economics and management was still in the traditional focus of AIESEC. In the 1980's quite a few Latin American, Asian and African countries were accepted as members. U.S.S.R. became member in 1989.

AAI WAS BORN. Several ex-AIESECARS cum AIESEC ALUMNI gathered in Budapest in the autumn of 1986 and founded AIESEC ALUMNI International (AAI). The organisation started offering a shelter for AIESEC alumni. Its secretariat is in Brussels and the organisation offers alumni to be organised. AAI members meet once internationally (usually in a different country in February every year). Close contacts between AIESEC and AAI are established and results of cooperation are seen especially after the Sicily International Congress in 2004. AIESEC top official responsible for alumni programs is an ex-offo member of AAI Executive Board.

GLOBAL THEMES AND PROJECTS. Besides traditional AIESEC activities, new themes and projects were defined in 1990's. The most important was „Interdependence – Learning and Acting for a Shared Future“. This theme worked to get people thinking and participating with an appreciation of the interdependencies of the world. Activities based on a period of focus and consolidation were adopted. Especially a focus on a core of AIESEC – traineeships – was strengthened. Through AIESEC Youth Development Exchange Programme (YDEP), a student trainee is immersed into the social framework of a new country. AIESEC had to find a new role in the society after the end of the Cold War. In the period of 1990 till 1996 especially ex-Communist countries joined AIESEC (such as Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Croatia, Slovenia, Herzegovina, Lithuania, Macedonia, Ukraine, Armenia, Latvia etc.). The period of 1997 to 2001 was quite an exceptional regarding new members.

In years of 1997 to 2001 no new country as a member was accepted.

NEW CENTURY, NEW COUNTRIES, NEW CONCEPTS. The 21st century have brought new countries into AIESEC family: the most important country was Mainland China (2002), UAE, Afghanistan, Jordan, but also some of ex-Soviet territories like Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Georgia, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan are a part of AIESEC family. It is important to The AIESEC network as of February 2008 includes 50000 students in 110 countries and territories at over 1600 universities across the globe and realizing around 10000 exchanges (traineeships) yearly. AIESEC provides 470 conferences yearly and virtual tools to build networks. AIESEC expands the organisation to new countries periodically. Countries listed as „Official Extension“ of AIESEC as of February 2010 include Algeria, Angola, Bahrain, Benin, Botswana, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Gabon, Georgia, Iceland, Ireland, Mongolia, Mozambique, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Vietnam and Zimbabwe.

STRUCTURE IN THE END. AIESEC operates at four levels: Local Committees (LCs), Member Committees (MCs), Growth Networks (GN) and AIESEC International (AI). A LC is based out of a university (or group of nearby universities) which is responsible for the functional operation of AIESEC leadership and international internship programs. Each country (sometimes groups of countries or territories within a country) with an AIESEC presence has its own MC which coordinates activities for that area (conferences, partnerships, government relations). MC members are elected by LCs. AI provides similar support to MCs and its members are elected by MCs. In addition to its members, AI, MCs and LCs generally have a board of directors/board of advisors composed of externalists from the region as well as alumni. These boards provide guidance to the organisation and in some cases are legally accountable for AIESEC actions. Basically, AIESEC is composed of the following departments: business development, outgoing exchange, incoming exchange, talent management, finance, projects, communications and human resources.

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